

Allotment gardening

Organic food is supposed to be best, for many reasons, including the fact that as an allotment gardener you are doing something to keep fit.

You are also helping the City Council to localise food production in the area, thus also combatting climate change by reducing emissions.

Apart from that, the community spirit engendered by an allotment site can bring benefits to all of the owners, according to the Draft Strategy for allotments currently under consideration. The words draft and strategy can disguise lengthy wordy unintelligible documents, but not in this particular case. It is a very readable document containing many very sensible suggestions.

In the shops organic food is usually more expensive. So, if you cannot afford to buy the organic stuff then maybe you feel like growing your own. If you live in the centre of town then it can prove difficult as few houses or flats have exclusive gardens large enough to support vegetables for a family. The alternative would be to rent an allotment. So how do you become an allotment gardener?

Allotments are dotted all over the city in 26 different sites. There are just over 1200 plots or half-plots in the city. An allotment has to be 300 square yards, although the average size in Edinburgh is about 200 square yards. When you rent an allotment from the Council you are only allowed to use the food you grow for your own purposes, as the annual rent is low at under £100 per annum. You may have seen the happy band of gardeners in one of these and hope to join the merry throng. Well you will have to join the 2152 others who are in the queue.

The shortest waiting list for an allotment is four years....YES

YOU READ THAT CORRECTLY – 4 years!

There are three sites where you only have to wait for four years – Craigentenny, Stenhouse and Saughton. The other allotment sites have waiting times of up to 9 years (at Midmar and Inverleith).

At the moment the future provision of allotments is under consideration by the City of Edinburgh Council. A consultation paper has been issued which is under discussion till 23 April 2010. This is a strategy paper trying to identify new ways of giving more people the opportunity of growing their own food within the city.

One of the ways in which the City Council hope to develop this is by acquiring new sites, (partly to replace land removed for tram construction). Some parks are being looked at, as allotments could be set up within at least some of these, and would not involve the Council in any significant financial outlay.

You may view the consultation paper by visiting the council website here. It is very readable and has many constructive suggestions in it.

You may otherwise send your comments to the council by emailing them at parks@edinburgh.gov.uk

One way to sidestep the queue for allotments is to join the scheme run by Care and Repair Edinburgh who match those who struggle to maintain their gardens with those who want to garden. This involves Disclosure Scotland checks, particularly necessary where the owner of the garden is an elderly person. But it could work out for the best in so many ways, allowing one person to have the garden they so desire, and the other to have company that they might otherwise lack.

Tonya Brash from Care & Repair said:- “The Scheme is going well and we are continuing to accept applications

for both gardeners and garden owners. How easy it is for us to match people depends on where people are and how far gardening volunteers are willing to travel.”

There are other initiatives mentioned in the consultation paper such as community gardens.

If you own an allotment and would like to tell us about the benefits to you and your family then get in touch with us! You can complete the form on the Contact Us page.